

DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 386 659

CG 026 483

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TITLE Are Children More at Risk of Being Sexually Abused if
Their Mothers Were Sexually Abused as Children?
PUB DATE [95]
NOTE 12p.
PUB TYPE Reports - Research/Technical (143)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *At Risk Persons; *Child Abuse; Children; Elementary
Education; *Mothers; Parent Child Relationship;
Parent Influence; Prevention; *Sexual Abuse
IDENTIFIERS Ohio (Lucas County)

ABSTRACT

Due to the increase in child sexual abuse allegations, it is essential to know possible predictors or risk factors to aid in prevention. This study examines the correlation between a mother who was sexually abused as a child and the increased risk of her children being sexually abused. The sample consisted of 60 child sexual abuse investigations conducted at Lucas County (Ohio) Children Services. A comparison was made between the investigations disposition, for instance substantiated, indicated or unsubstantiated, and the mothers' self-report of being sexually abused as children. The results from this study showed a positive relationship between the mothers who were sexually abused during childhood and their having children who were sexually abused. Contains seven references. (Author)

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Running head: CHILDREN AT RISK OF BEING SEXUALLY ABUSED

Are Children More at Risk of Being Sexually Abused if Their
Mothers Were Sexually Abused as Children?

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Abstract

Due to the increase in child sexual abuse allegations, it is essential to know possible predictors or risk factors to aid in prevention. This study examines the correlation between a mother that was sexually abused as a child and the increased risk of her children being sexually abused. The sample consisted of 60 child sexual abuse investigations conducted at Lucas County Children Services. A comparison was made between the investigations disposition, for instance substantiated, indicated or unsubstantiated, and the mothers' self-report of being sexually abused as children. The results from this study showed a positive relationship between the mothers that were sexually abused during childhood and their having children that were sexually abused.

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Are Children More at Risk of Being Sexually Abused if Their Mothers Were Abused as Children?

Purpose of this study

Sexual abuse is an increasing problem in the United States. In 1993 alone there were 1,016,000 sexual abuse cases that were substantiated. (National Committee to Prevent Child Abuse Survey, 1993) Past research consistently indicates that child sexual abuse is able to continue partially due to the victim's mother's personality profile. (Muram, Rosenthal, & Beck, 1994) Some characteristics have been found to be compatible with adult females who were sexually abused as children. Long-term effects of childhood sexual abuse on adult women have been well documented. (Draucker, 1995) Some of these effects or characteristics that have been consistent were having low coping mechanisms, feeling of powerlessness, being involved in disturbed interpersonal relationships and increased vulnerability. (Draucker, 1995; Mayall & Gold, 1995) Due to the growing numbers of reported sexual abuse cases and the documented long-term effects on female survivors as adults there needs to be data detecting if there is a positive relationship between females who were sexually abused as children and the increased risk of their children being sexually abused.

Previous Studies Regarding Sexual Abuse and Family Dynamics

There was not a particular study that contained specific data regarding a relationship between a mother being sexually abused as a child and the increased the risk of her children being sexually abused. There was, however, a great deal of research pertaining to the personality characteristics of mothers that were sexually abused as children and how it effects their lives and their families lives. One observation that was consistent across the various studies was that a woman that was sexually abused as a child is more likely to become involved with an abuser. (Muram, Rosenthal, & Beck, 1994) Hence, a high percentage of step-fathers or mother's boyfriend's are likely to perpetrate their children. (Margolin & Craft, 1989) Another study goes further to state that a "victim's mother often sacrifice their daughters to preserve a relationship with some significant other." (Muram, Rosenthal, & Beck, 1994) This clearly coincides with the research that states women abused as children have a greater chance of becoming involved in a disturbed interpersonal relationship. (Draucker, 1995)

There is a clear consistency in past literature that indicates a relationship between a relationship between family characteristics and child sexual abuse. (Long & Jackson, 1994)

One pointed out that a woman who was sexually abused in childhood can be a predictor of anxiety and depression in adult women. (Yama, Tovey, Fogas, 1993) These possible personality characteristics, and the ones mentioned earlier, such as having a sense of vulnerability and powerlessness, can all increase the risk of their children being sexually abused. (Draucker, 1995; Mayall & Gold, 1995)

Summary

In support of the past research on women who were sexually abused as children, this study suggests that these women's children are at a greater risk of being abused. There has not been a study to clearly report any statistical information which is another key reason why this study is significant. The more studies that are completed in this area may aid helping professionals to make more thorough evaluations and investigations

Major Question and Definitions

Research Question. The main question in this study is if there is a greater chance of a child being sexually abused if that child's mother was sexually abused as a child.

Definitions. Sexual abuse by the state of Ohio is defined as any acts of a sexual nature upon or with a child. The act may be for gratification of the perpetrator or a -

third party. When a child sexual abuse allegation is investigated by a child protection services (CPS) agency there can be three possible findings being substantiated, indicated, or unsubstantiated. A substantiated disposition denotes that an admission of the fact of child abuse or neglect (CA/N) by person(s) responsible, an adjudication of CA/N, other forms of confirmation deemed valid by the agency or a professional judgment made by CPS investigative staff that incidents of abuse/neglect have occurred to the child(ren). An unsubstantiated finding determines that there was no occurrence of CA/N. The indicated finding is circumstantial evidence, medical or other isolated indicators of CA/N exists but lacking confirmation at this time.

Method

Subjects

The subjects used in this study were comprised of 60 families where a child in that family has been investigated regarding sexual abuse allegations. All of the families reside in Lucas County Ohio. The study looked at 20 of each dispositional finding. Thus, 20 substantiated cases, 20 indicated cases, and 20 unsubstantiated cases all pertaining to sexual abuse allegations.

Measures

Since I work at Lucas County Children Services I had access to the files and records regarding past investigations completed at the Agency. 20 cases of each dispositional finding regarding sexual abuse allegations were randomly sampled from closed cases over the past three months. The random sample was computer generated.

Procedures

After receiving a computer generated random sample of 20 substantiated sexual abuse cases, 20 indicated sexual abuse cases and 20 unsubstantiated abuse cases I had all 60 files pulled for review. It is standard practice for each investigator to inquire whether or not the alleged child victim's parent(s) was sexually abused, physically abused or neglected as a child. Thus, I documented what each mother self-reported. I also checked Lucas County Children Services records to see if there was any documentation of the past. In all 60 cases there was no documentation of an investigation completed on the mothers that admitted to being sexually abused as a child.

Results

Table 1 displays 20 substantiated sexual abuse cases, 20 indicated sexual abuse case and 20 unsubstantiated sexual abuse cases investigated by Lucas County Children Services. It also compares these dispositions to the mothers self-report if they were sexually abused or not as children. As expected there is a higher number of mothers that reported being sexually abused in the substantiated cases. It is surprising to see such a low number of mothers that reported being sexually abused in the indicated cases. The chi-square test for goodness of fit test was used in this study to determine if the results supported the hypothesis. It was there is a very good fit between the substantiated case data and the hypothesis since the observed frequency is closer to the expected frequency and the chi-square value was relatively small. Therefore, there is a positive relationship between mothers that were sexually abused as children and the chances of their children being sexually abused.

Place Table 1 about here

Conclusion

Due to the increasing number of children being investigated for sexual abuse allegations, it is important to be able to identify the contributing risk factors or predictors that lead to the abuse. For the sample compiled in this study there was a positive correlation between mothers that were sexually abused as children and their children being sexually abused. There can be many explanations for these results as presented in past studies. Such as the mothers personality characteristics, in particular the likelihood of the mothers sexually abused in childhood becoming personally involved with an abuser that would perpetrate on their children. To help children and take preventative steps in child sexual abuse education is essential. There needs to be more studies like this that have further controlled, prospective research to clarify whether a mothers pre-assault traits predispose children to higher risk for sexual abuse. (Muram, Rosenthal, Beck, 1995)

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Table 1

**CHILDREN INVESTIGATED FOR BEING SEXUALLY ABUSED
COMPARED WITH THE NUMBER OF THEIR MOTHERS THAT WERE
SEXUALLY ABUSED AS CHILDREN**

	MOTHER'S SELF-REPORT OF BEING SEXUALLY ABUSED AS A CHILD			
	RESPONDED YES	RESPONDED NO	TOTAL	CHI- SQUARE
SUBSTANTIATED CASES	13	7	20	4
INDICATED CASES	6	14	20	33
UNSUBSTANTIATED CASES	4	16	20	64